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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 004472

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NEA/IPA FOR
WILLIAMS/SHAMPAINE/STEINGER; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS;
TREASURY FOR SZUBIN/LOEFFLER/NUGENT/HIRSON

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: PALESTINIANS SEEK PROGRESS ON CROSSINGS AMA
IMPLEMENTATION

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) ConGenoffs, accompanied by USSC, USAID and Embassy Tel Aviv representatives, met October 10 with Palestinian negotiators from the previous PA government who were involved in the negotiation of the Agreement on Access and Movement (AMA). The informal meeting, the first in a series of preliminary brainstorming discussions intended to reinvigorate AMA implementation efforts, focused exclusively on crossings, particularly the Karni/al-Mintar crossing. The Palestinians, led by representatives of the PLO's Negotiations Support Unit (NSU) and including former Minister of Planning Ghassan al-Khatib, reiterated that efforts should also be made to develop a common management system that could be used as a model for other crossings.

Crossing Problems

¶2. (C) The meeting began with a review of the situation at the crossings. According to the Palestinian side, persistent problems at Karni/al-Mintar include:

-- Throughput is actually worse than before November 2005.
(Note: Average export volume in September 2006 was 15 truckloads per day. End Note.)

-- In light of last growing season's catastrophic losses due to the inability to export fresh produce, many farmers in Gaza did not plant crops this season.

-- The GOI is not employing USG-leased scanners to make the security screening process more efficient. (Note: USAID staff have observed USG-leased scanners being efficiently used at West Bank crossings. End note.)

-- Products from the West Bank that have already undergone inspection and/or scanning at West Bank crossings are regularly subject to inspection and scanning again at Karni/al-Mintar before entering Gaza whereas Israeli products destined for Gaza are not subject to similar scrutiny.

-- Raw materials and other industrial inputs rarely make it on to the schedule for delivery into Gaza while finished Israeli products continue to flow.

-- Israeli products are given priority over West Bank goods in terms of scheduling import shipments into Gaza.

-- The lack of transparency in crossing management operations has fueled corruption on both sides.

¶3. (C) NSU Policy Advisor Nizar Farsakh commented that, even with the current system and procedural shortcomings, the crossings could be operating much more efficiently. Karni/al-Mintar, for example, could handle 150 truckloads per day from Gaza, an AMA goal to have been reached by December 31, 2005, without additional scanner technology. The Palestinian side noted that having the Israeli side agree to standardized packing of shipments at all crossings would help the private sector and could expedite security screening.

Israeli Commitment Sought

¶4. (C) Ghassan Khatib said he feels that the Israelis continue to severely restrict movement for political reasons, often in the context of unspecified threats to crossings. In his view, what is needed is a security plan that satisfies the Israelis and is fully implemented and adhered to by all parties to the agreements. Khatib said that the Palestinians had no problem with the USSC's project for improving security at Karni/al-Mintar, but he had yet to hear details of Israeli views on the plan. Palestinian participants expressed some optimism on the Karni Project but also stressed the need for Israeli concurrence. Khatib added that Israeli agreement on a crossing management system is also necessary if efforts to improve crossing efficiency are to succeed.

PA Presidency Forms Crossings Steering Committee

¶5. (C) Farsakh advised that the PA Presidency had established a steering committee on crossings, chaired by PLO Chief Negotiator Sa'eb Erekat, consisting of representatives from the PA President's office (Mohammed Mustafa and Rafiq Husseini), the General Administration on Crossings and Borders (GACB), the Presidential Guard, and the private sector. NSU Legal Advisor Zeinah Salahi confirmed after the meeting that this body would be involved in any "formal" discussions on crossings.

Next Steps: Common Management System for Karni?

¶6. (C) Meeting participants agreed with ConGen EconChief's suggestion that a December 2005 draft proposal on crossing operations could serve as a basis for formulating a proposal on a management system for Karni/al-Mintar. All agreed that the management system adopted at Karni/al-Mintar would subsequently serve as a model for other crossings. Such a proposal on a management system would complement the USSC-led efforts on improving security on the Palestinian side of the crossing. ConGen will follow up with Embassy Tel Aviv, USSC and USAID.

WALLES